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ABSTRACT

In this paper presented at a school media staff development institute, the author discusses the motivation of children in using library/media materials, and describes picture books he has written. Friendly and responsive librarians and media specialists should create an exciting atmosphere for children in the library. Frequent library visits, accessible materials, and many activities, e.g., storytelling and book displays, can stimulate and develop children's interests. Children like to participate in running the library. Speech improvement can be encouraged through use of tape recordings. Audiovisual materials should be used in conjunction with books for stimulating, personal, and exciting experiences. Children's imaginations can be stimulated by helping them to understand their relationships to books, introducing them to writers as people, and encouraging them to create their own stories. Books create a sharing relationship between book, adult, and child. Sharing thoughts and feelings and enlightened use of books and media can encourage enthusiasm and liberate children's imaginations to facilitate learning. (KP)

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OPENING THE WORLD:

MOTIVATION IN THE USE OF LIBRARY / MEDIA MATERIALS

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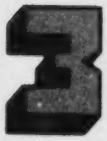

Foreword

Steven Kroll in "Opening the World: Motivation in the Use of Library Media Materials" has written with particular insight about the importance of individualized readng. He illustrates the contribution that books and other media have made on the instructional program. Mr. Kroll reminds the library media specialists that library media programs facilitate and improve student learning through their emphasis on learners, individualization, inquiry, and independent learning. He places strong emphasis on program collections and an environment which provide a variety of learning opportunities for students.

His talk is being reproduced at the request of the program participants since it is envisioned that the content of Mr. Kroll's paper will have many uses throughout the library media community.

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OPENING THE WORLD:

Motivation in the Use of Library/Media Materials

Steven Kroll

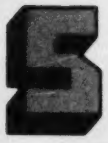
I am a writer. I am not a librarian, I am not a media specialist, I am not a teacher, though I have taught writing at the university level. At first it seemed odd that I should have been asked to give a speech on motivation in the use of library/media materials. Then I realized that it wasn't really odd at all, because writing, after all, is inseparable from reading, from observation, from any form of learning, and teaching and writing have essentially the same goals. Those goals, to me, are communication, excitement, and, perhaps most important, the liberation of the imagination.

You will notice that in those goals I haven't included information. It seems to me that information will come easily if we follow the right course, if the children in our care know we are open to them and they can be open to us and that, in a phrase, we really want to open the world to them. As John Holt said in *What Do I Do Monday?*, the schooling of most children in this country continues to destroy their curiosity, trust, confidence, and intelligence. We continue, even now, to overemphasize the obeying of rules: not talking, taking attendance, the use of obscenities in class. And although all of these rules and regulations may relate directly to good citizenship and the way we would like our young people to behave in the community, none of them has very much, or even anything, to do with the excitement of learning. And it is the excitement of learning that school and our roles are all about.

Our schools still present an authoritarian world in which we teach democracy. Is it any wonder that children come out of such schools rather schizoid, rather manipulative, in their behavior? No, it doesn't seem to me odd at all. In fact, there is an article in the May 3rd issue of New York Magazine about Howard Hurwitz, a high school principal in the New York area. You may have heard of him. He's the principal of Long Island City High School. There are pictures of Dr. Hurwitz in the article that show a rather smug, rather closed man. He's in the news these days because he insisted upon suspending a young girl from his school for being disruptive, when clearly the things she had done, although certainly disruptive, were not disruptive enough to merit either suspension or expulsion. The more you read about Howard Hurwitz, the more you realize that there is no dialogue in his school. There is no communication between him, his teachers, and his students, or between the teachers and the students. Everyone has to do everything by slip. Before you go anywhere or do anything, you must have a slip for it. And although that can certainly serve a purpose in the proper context, it is not the way to run a school.

It's quite clear to me that in Long Island City High School, there is really very little learning taking place. Oh yes, students may be reading textbooks. They may be learning a certain amount of algebra and English and whatever else is in the curriculum, but they are not really learning. They are not learning what is going to be useful to them later on — what will be beneficial to them as human beings. And it seems to me, in a larger sense, that children really must have greater control over their own learning.

As John Holt said in *How Children Learn*, "What teachers and learners need to know is what we have known for some time — first, that vivid, vital, pleasurable experiences are the easiest to remember, and secondly, that memory works best when unforced, that it is not a mule that can be made to walk by beating it."



Now, before you think that I'm a hands-down disciple of John Holt, let me assure you that I am not. I have been to schools where there is no discipline and, consequently, no learning. I am aware that we have to teach our students, particularly our younger children, the basic skills before we can open the world to them. I am particularly aware of the example of my young niece, who began her education in an open classroom where you were allowed to do anything you wanted all day. Well, my niece liked to bake, and she became, after a while, quite an accomplished baker. In fact, she was even able to make a rather astonishingly good pretzel, which tasted very much like old fashioned New York bagels. There was only one problem. My niece didn't know how to read, and at the end of the year her teacher came to my sister and said, "Clearly your daughter has a learning disability, she has not learned to read."

Fortunately my sister was well aware that there was really no problem with this very bright child. She had the good sense to hire a tutor for her, transfer her to a more traditional and conventionally-oriented school and, within a year, my niece, now eight, is a fully accomplished reader and quite on a par with the rest of her classmates. On the other hand, I should add that I wouldn't rule out the open-classroom technique as a possibility. It's just that in many instances this technique is either inappropriately administered or poorly applied.

But how then, how are we to combine this need to teach with the need to learn, with the need to let our children improvise and extend themselves and to grow in ways that are comfortable and congenial both for individuals and for a group? Well, it seems to me that the answer is not in lesson plans, not in reading programs, and certainly not in textbooks. The answer is easy, and I know you know what it is. The answer is in our classrooms, but it is also in our libraries and in our media centers and what we are to find in them.

From my point of view, the library ought to be the center of the school, the center of all the activity that goes on in the school. It should be a friendly place, a place where children enjoy coming as often as they can. It is not, most certainly not, a place where kids are sent if they happen to be bad. The media specialist, like the teacher, has to be a friendly, responsive person — a person responsive to children, a person who is in some way in touch with his or her own childhood, just as writers for children, if they are to be most effective, should be in touch with their own childhoods. In fact, that is what I always say when people ask me how I can write books for children without having any. If you have contact with kids and if you know something about what it is to be a child, there is no problem.

In short, a librarian, a teacher, a media specialist, must in some way, be touched with wonder. And that wonder, if it is there, will communicate itself to the children, the children will know.

I can remember my own AVE instructor in grade school. It was called AVE then. Her name was Miss Chandler, and although she was not very attractive, and was rather dowdy, and wore rimless glasses and her hair in a bun, she was able, once the lights were off, to inspire us all. No one was concerned any longer with who was doing what to whom in the front row. We were all fascinated by what was there on the screen or on the record player.

But when it comes to the actual functioning of the media center, it seems to me that children have to be introduced gradually to what is available. Too much all at once can be very confusing. And, in the case of perhaps slightly older children who may not yet be aware of what is available in the library, there's a rather entertaining book on the subject called, *Elmo Doolan and the Search for the Golden Mouse*, by Shirley Rousseau Murphy. In this book, there is a family of mice living in a library. Led by son Elmo, they all decide that father mouse must write his great book on the history of mice. And the way they go about helping father write his book, which is completed and published, is to learn all about how to use the library. In the process, of course, it is really quite easy for an older child to learn the whys and wherefores of the library as well; but just as it does for the Doolans, the library must become an adventure and an experience for the child, never a chore. In this regard, children must always be encouraged to go their own way, to pursue their own hobbies, their own interests, and what relates directly to their own experience.

At the same time, children ought to be able to participate, where possible, in the running of the library. They should be able to help check out books and help with the running of the machines. Children love machines — they tend to treat everything they come upon as a new machine to figure out how to work. And if you can allow them to participate in this way, the results can be marvelous. Also, if a child has developed a certain expertise, it should be possible to allow him or her to help in the selection of a book, or books, on that subject for the library.

I think it's also important to bring older and younger children together in the library. Older children can teach younger ones a lot, and although there can be problems in bringing different age groups together, since older kids are not always so amenable to having younger kids around, this method was always very successful in our old-time

one-room schools. There is no reason why it shouldn't be successful in the library and media center of today.

A plea from Jane Feder, my editor at Pantheon, comes at this point. There should really be more books facing out on the shelves. There is nothing quite so daunting to a child entering a library as a whole series of rather sinister and unfriendly spines. If you can present the books you've just acquired in such a way that their attractive front covers or jackets are exposed, you can usually attract the child's interest.

At the same time, there should be more frequent library visits included in the school week. Children should be able to feel that the library is almost a kind of second home to them. And the books have to be accessible. You have to let the children take the books out if they want to. You have to be less concerned with what is going to happen if the books are taken out then you are with the child's experience of taking them out.

Not so long ago, I was visiting a school and happened to be in the library/media center when a little girl I had met that day rushed up and showed me, quite proudly, a copy of my book, *Is Milton Missing?*, that she had just taken out of the library and was going to take home with her that evening. The smile on her face and her enthusiasm because she had been allowed to take that book home meant just about as much to me as the day the book was published.

There have to be many activities to stimulate interest in the materials available in the library. You have to keep up with story hours and, perhaps, even hold a weekly storytelling where it's possible. You have to have exhibits, book displays, and discussions, all of which are going to be of interest to the child. I can remember how the very sight of posters and mobiles for the latest book week activity made a tremendous amount of difference to me and my own interest in what was going on in the library. In the words of Mary Gaver, "The library is a place where learning occurs, not just where learning materials are stored."

If there is excitement in the library, there's going to be excitement on the part of the child for living and for learning. But, of course, none of this can be or should be limited to work in the library itself. There has to be extensive coordination between the library and the classroom.

Teachers, librarians, and media specialists should work together in developing programs. Teachers should let the librarians know what they need and what's going to be useful to them in their classes. Teachers have to be aware of the books and the other materials available in the library/media center. Perhaps at the beginning of the semes-

ter, librarians should involve teachers in the books and other materials they might be selecting for purchase or for use during the year. In this way, with this kind of interaction, librarians and teachers are going to profit from one another, and they're going to learn together what is needed most in their classrooms and in the library.

Librarians have to show teachers what books and other materials they might have overlooked. And teachers, librarians, and media specialists must be familiar with childrens' literature. That means not simply a familiarity with the classics — with the *Alice in Wonderlands* and the A. A. Milnes — but with the latest Maurice Sendak, or the latest Lloyd Alexander, as well. The sight of a new book is a momentous event for a child, just as it is a mementous event for the author, I might add.

There ought to be rotating classroom collections of books. Some of these books should be coordinated directly with the curriculum, but some should not. There should be no dichotomy between what is reading for schoolwork and what is reading for pleasure. We have to learn for ourselves and teach our children that enjoyment is also a part of learning, just as enjoyment must be considered a serious part of all our lives. It took years for me to understand that I could enjoy my writing more than anything else in the world and still consider it work. The fact that I could sit down at my typewriter every morning and really love being there didn't in some way mean I had to feel guilty for all those other people who weren't doing things they loved. The Puritan ethic had been there to chide me, and even today there are moments when I say to myself, "Oh my God! I really ought to be in an office!"

But thinking more along these lines and of a more creative approach to enjoyment, it's important to be able to coordinate not only library and classroom activity but library and classroom activity with other aspects of the school curriculum, perhaps with an art class or a music class. Kids love to make things. They love to *do* things in the process of learning whatever it is they're learning. And if we can somehow extend what they've learned in the media center or in the library to other areas of their lives, they will soon understand that learning affects everything, that it doesn't just affect what goes on in school. And we can involve them in an exciting continuum of creative activity.

At the same time, thinking of that continuum, it seems to me that the school librarian or media specialist should make a point of participating in other school activities whenever possible. And if it is not possible to participate, at least there should be an effort made to attend those activities, so that the children again are made to understand that every activity is important and involves a different aspect of learning.

Having visited schools fairly frequently, it also occurs to me (and this may seem like blasphemy up to a point), that very often our classroom and library periods are too short. Not too long, but too short. When a child gets interested in something, it is possible for that child to be absorbed for an hour or more, perhaps even a morning, if the subject is really appealing. We continue to place entirely too much emphasis on the fact that even though we've only just begun to explore this process or this problem we're all so interested in, the bell has rung and "I'm sorry but it's time for gym." There has to be some kind of flexibility within the curriculum, perhaps particular hours during the week when it becomes possible to extend the classroom or the library periods so children can become really interested in things and develop those interests. Otherwise, they will continually be torn from a whole area of make-believe or an area of the world that has just begun to excite them, and they will end up more familiar with the rules and regulations of the school than with the expansive possibilities of the learning process.

But how are these materials that are available to us now best employed to provide motivation for the child? Of course, to start with, we must accept the right of children to have opinions other than our own. We're not always right. There's no reason in the world why a child should not be allowed to express an opinion that is different from ours, and that child must be made to feel that his or her thoughts are going to be acceptable to the teacher or the librarian.

We must not be correcting our children constantly, quizzing them, asking them questions. There are areas where this must be done, but it is important for the child to understand that he or she is not going to be trapped by what we can call the failure syndrome. Within the failure syndrome, the child ceases to learn because there's no longer any excitement for learning. The child is so afraid that anything he or she does is going to be criticized or considered incorrect that he or she withdraws into a shell. And that child really becomes unapproachable and perhaps even more manipulative than most of the children who are coming out of our schools today because that child is so intent upon disguising the fact that he or she is not becoming involved in the learning process there's no room for anything else.

Every day has to be a fresh start for every child. School has to be, and the library itself has to be, exciting. I can't repeat that often enough. And one of the ways in which school and the library can become exciting is for us to listen to our children. There is no real taking without real listening and trust. And if we can listen to our children and trust them, they will say much that we need to hear. At the same time, if our children are allowed to talk, both in school and in the library, there is a great deal they can learn.

Nancy Larrick, in *A Parents Guide to Children's Reading*, a book I'm sure most of you are familiar with, points out that the ability to speak words easily, to recognize them and put them into coherent sentences, makes a great difference when it comes time for the child to learn to read in school. Children love to talk, and they should be encouraged in that love. It's not the teacher or the librarian who needs practice in talking, it's the child who needs that practice. And if we can open up our classrooms and our library and media centers in such a way that we can give children the experience of talking, they'll be a lot better off in all areas of their learning.

The need for talk leads me into a discussion of the use of the tape recorder, which is really, it seems to me, essential both in the classroom and in our library and media centers. Once a child has overcome his or her initial shyness over the use of the machine, the result can be utterly fascinating. Children learn to speak better. They can conduct interviews with one another. They can make private tapes they can keep for themselves and play back. They can make public tapes for use in the classroom. They can learn to use the machine itself. They can improvise their own shows. They can do commercials. They can be transported, really, through their own participation, into a wholly different realm.

I remember my own radio workshop experience in the sixth grade, even though it developed, as I've explained today, a perennial fear of getting shocked by microphones. In the workshop, I played Oscar the Talking Seal. And it was wonderful because, of course, Oscar the Talking Seal was the leading role. And the end of each session within this specially put-together studio that looked exactly like a radio station, we would play back the tape and I'd be absolutely enthralled.

But the tape recorder invites more direct participation than any other audiovisual media, and even it is no substitute for the essential participation that can come out of working with books. Now don't get me wrong. That doesn't mean I refuse to believe in slides or filmstrips, or film loops, or records, or pictures, or films, or videotapes, or any of the rather various and dazzling media available to us today. We have to work with those media, and they can be very exciting and very stimulating. But essentially, I see them as supplementary to our use of the book.

Of course, all media can open up new vistas for children. They can introduce them to and provide them with experiences that the book simply can't. But even for the TV-struck child, there is still no substitute for the book. I think of the children of my own acquaintance who, when I bring them a new book of my own, or when I sit down to read a story with them, are overwhelmed by the experience we are about to share. Sharing a book is different every time. It's the kind of experience other media simply cannot provide.

Of course, there is always the case of the child who is never going to be a reader, who, for whatever reason, is simply not going to be interested in books. For him or for her obviously, there is no substitute for an indepth exposure to other kinds of media. And needless to say, I, like most of us, have read my Marshall McLuhan, and I know that the medium is the message and that the media are extensions of ourselves. I even have a rather haunting neurosis about the telephone, a neurosis that seems to creep into both my work for children and my work for adults.

I tend to see the phone as both the great communicator and the great purveyor of non-communication, as the great invader of our privacy and as an unwitting controller of our lives. But I am also aware, having read my McLuhan, that there are hot media and cool media, and that the hot media are low in participation because they are so well filled with data, and that examples of hot media are print, movies,

and radio, and that the cool media that we have in our midst are high in participation because high in audience completion and low in information and that TV and comics fit into this category. And I know, too, according to Mr. McLuhan, that with TV, information is better absorbed than it is through the lecture, or radio, or print. Indeed, if I happened to be on television now instead of before you, you would be much better able to absorb a great deal more of what I'm saying.

Yet to me, most of our electronic media, while providing a kind of essential bombardment of information, tend to tune us out when it comes to new experience, to tune us out of ourselves and away from each other. I can think of any number of examples. There's the boy on the street with the transistor radio stuck in his ear, who has absolutely no communication with anyone. There's the child, drunk on TV, who seems to remember nothing but the Burger King commercial that he trots out at every turn. I think of a friend of mine at dinner just the other night. As we sat down at the table, his wife asked if he would change the rather loud rock music that was blaring over the stereo to something else. And he did. He went into the living room, turned off the rock music, and turned on Beethoven's Fifth Symphony at top volume. Well, here was someone, much as I adore him in other ways, who had clearly been educated away from communication between people, someone who had no idea that if you played loud music at the dinner table, no matter how marvelous it was, people would not be able to communicate.

I think as well of a recent issue of New York Magazine that featured the media room. There was spread after colorful spread of private media rooms, supposedly the coming thing in people's homes. And there were all of these people within these rather elaborate, rather expensive settings with attractive furniture from Bloomingdale's and innumerable dials and fancy equipment and a screen at the end of the room. And all of them were glued to the screen, utterly incommunicative, utterly out of touch with one another, staying up all night long and then, it seemed, stumbling off to bed without knowing quite what it was they'd experienced.

Then, of course, there is the matter of the discotheque. Well, a discotheque can be a rather pleasant place. I'm someone who enjoys dancing; I'm a rather good dancer as a matter of fact. But it seems to me that what is happening today, at least in New York discotheques, is an entirely outrageous thing. You arrive, and the music never quits. And it's still going at top volume long after you've gone. There is never a moment to recoup your resources, never a moment to enjoy a moment of communication with the people you happen to be with. There may be some communication, one with the other, out on the dance floor, but I'm not sure how effective that communication is.

In short, to say it again, all of these forms of media, when used in excess, really end up disconnecting us from our relationships with ourselves, with one another, and with our humanity. Use these materials, but don't use them exclusively. Use them in conjunction with the book.

It's funny, because I was talking with a friend of mine, a college classmate, just the other day and we were saying that with nonprint media, people seemed to retain a great deal less than they did with print media. And I thought myself, and perhaps you might think yourselves, that when you've watched the evening news, what you remember of what you've watched is probably a good deal less than what you remember if you've read the morning or evening newspaper. It's certainly true of me. But regardless of whether there are other reasons for that, it still seems to me that there is nothing really quite so exciting, or so stimulating, as the use of the book in the learning process. There is nothing quite so personal as the one-to-one relationship you develop with a book.

Rose Agree is the children's librarian at the Forest Road School in Valley Stream, Long Island. She is also a friend, and I'm reminded of the story she once told me of a little girl who supposedly had a reading problem, and simply couldn't keep up with her classmates. When she was given the opportunity to select a book on any subject she wanted, this little girl immediately chose a book on Helen Keller and, with almost no difficulty, out of sheer excitement, was able to read it to Rose. Really, the excitement of books sometimes makes me feel almost incredibly lucky to be someone who writes them. And that, in fact, brings up an important point.

When I was a kid, and I'm sure it's still true in a lot of places today, I was taught that writers were different. Writers were not like you and me, not like other people; they were somehow, in their way, rather godlike. I was given the impression that our own imaginations were of very little consequence, that they were somehow inferior to those responsible for the books we were reading. There was no way to aspire to be a writer; there was something uncanny about that and mere mortals didn't do it. I should add that there were at least two of us in my class who became writers, so perhaps there are ways of strongarming that problem. But no one ever brought a writer to school. That just wasn't done. Literature remained something remote, something you absorbed second hand.

But writers are people. Books are written by people. And if you can, if there's any way at all, invite a writer, or writers, to your school. They'll come. They'll enjoy it. They might even find the experience as rewarding or even more rewarding than the children themselves do. I'm reminded again of my own experience. After I finish a reading of a book of mine, the questions that usually come up first are: What is it like to write a book, and where do your ideas come from? And I say that the ideas come from anywhere, they come from all around you, that there is nothing you experience that cannot in some way be an idea. I describe the way books of mine have happened, mentioning, perhaps, an adult novel that began with my seeing a rather eccentric old man in a 1950's style MG on a street in Portland, Maine. Well, they say, how can that begin a novel? How can that make a novel? Well, it did, I answer. It's the way things happen sometimes.

And then kids like to ask: Do you get tired of writing? And of course I say no, that there is nothing I would rather be doing, and how can you get tired of what you most like to do? And the response, when you say these things, is absolutely breathtaking. Kids immediately want to rush off and write their own books. And, of course, they all want the books to be published at once, which I would love, in many instances, to have happen.

But what is most important here is that kids be allowed and encouraged to discover their own imaginations, that they learn that the books they are reading and the other materials they are using are about human experience that is very like their own. Whether it is real experience or fantasy, it will not be unfamiliar to them.

Then again, we must encourage these children, our children, not just to understand that they have imaginations, but that they must use them as well. Where possible, we should not merely read stories to children; we should make them up ourselves.

The summer before I went to college, I worked as a counselor at a camp in the Burkshires, and like it or not, my group was the most obnoxious bunch of nine-year-olds imaginable. These were the kids who, when you took them to Sturbridge Village, scooted under the velvet ropes and sat on the two-hundred-year-old furniture. No one could really control them, least of all me, and there was a point when I stopped trying and started relating to them as kids. But quite early on I discovered how to avoid the problem of getting them all to go to bed. Every night I would tell a new chapter in the story of The Great Green Blob.

The Great Green Blob rolled through town after town, absorbing and devouring everything in its path. I think the story itself was a ripoff from somewhere else. I'm not exactly sure where I first heard it or what age-old comic book first lodged it in my memory, but obviously the source didn't really matter. As a child I'd always hated horror stories, but these kids adored each new embellishment of this one. And they would respond with such enthusiasm that afterwards, when I would say, well, now its time for bed, there would not be a single complaint.

But at the same time that we tell our children stories, we must encourage them to tell us their own. There should be periods, moments during certain days in class or in the library, when children may get up and tell stories if they have a mind to. One of my books, that I'm going to show you in a moment, provides an easy way of encouraging just that kind of thing in the form of a game. And even if the children you are involved with don't seem particularly interested in telling stories themselves, the very least you can do is encourage them to invent new endings to stories they've already read or stories they are reading at the moment.

It's very important for children to know, and it is never stressed often enough, that we are all carrying books around in our heads. We are not all writers, but we all have our stories to tell. In fact, everything we say tells a story. Our thoughts appear in our heads, to a great degree, in word pictures. The words we speak are word pictures. And the words that we write or the words that we speak are part of our identity. They say something about us, they define us as people. They are reflections on ourselves.

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When I'd say all these things at the opening session of the writing class I taught at the University of Maine, my students would be astonished. They'd have come through a secondary school program in which no one had ever explained that what they wrote or what they said had anything to do with them. And when I was able to convince them that this was so and that if they spoke badly and wrote badly they were, every single day, making fools of themselves, they would listen and respond. And by the end of the semester, almost every student in that class would have a style and would be writing pretty well.

So it's important for us to make our children understand their own relationships to books and those books' relationships to themselves. Which brings up a point about books as internal revelation. In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim has written, at length, about the importance of fairy tales for children. There was a time, not so long ago, when fairy tales were not encouraged as literature for children, either because they were too violent, or because they said things we didn't want children to hear. But, in fact, as Bettelheim has pointed out, children identify with fairy tales, and particularly when they're horrific. These tales enable children to begin to understand that their scary fantasies and dreams are not inhuman, not something to be repressed but are, instead, a part of all our lives and the world we live in. And in that respect, we have to make kids recognize that all of literature, and not just fairy tales, belongs to them.

Many teachers and many librarians still give the impression that what we consider to be high culture — poems, novels, Shakespeare — somehow belongs to the teacher and the librarian and not really to the student at all. In fact, kids are made to feel the same kind of remoteness about the books they read that they feel about the writers who write them.

With that dilemma in mind, I'd like to read you one paragraph. It's an extreme case, but it makes its point extremely well. The incident involves George Dennison and an illiterate twelve-year-old boy. It appeared first in Dennison's *Lives of Children* and was quoted by John Holt in *What Do I Do Monday?*

> . . . one day we were looking at a picture book of the Pilgrims. Jose understood that they had crossed the Atlantic, but something in the way he said it made me doubt his understanding. I asked him where the Atlantic was. I thought he might point out the window, since it lay not very far away. But his face took on an abject look, and he asked me weakly, "Where?" I asked him if he had ever gone swimming at Coney Island. He said, "Sure, man!" I told him that he had been swimming in the Atlantic, the same ocean the Pilgrims had crossed. His face lit up with pleasure and he threw back his head and laughed. There was a note of release in his laughter. It was clear that he had gained something more than information. He had discovered something. He and the Atlantic belonged to the same world! The Pilgrims were a fact of life.

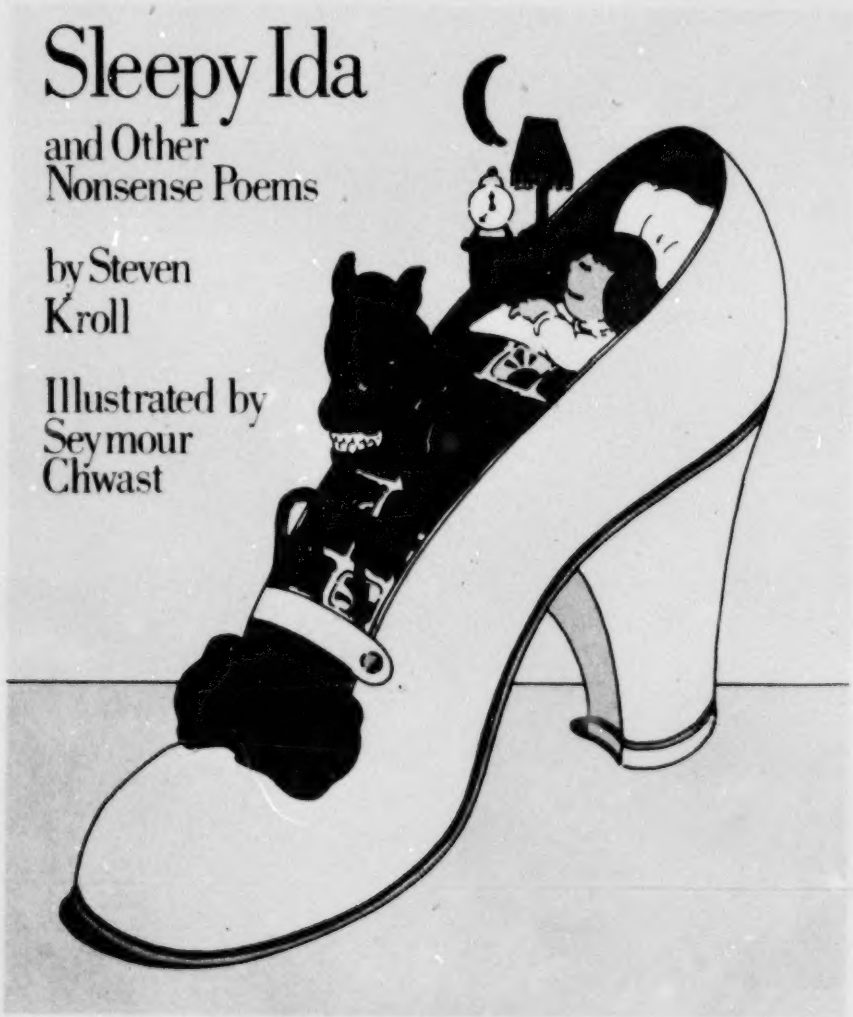
In this way we can move from the concept of books as self-discovery to to books as discovery of the world. We have to encourage the use of books as a natural part of our lives and of our classroom activity. Those books should be well written. They should be vital and straightforward. They can be on any subject of interest, on anything that the group or the individual child might find appealing. And if you give children the best, they will like the best. But at the same time, there must be a lot of what Mary Gaver has called, "free reading and creative inquiry." Children should be allowed to read, to a great extent, as they please. And there should be no rules for the kinds of responses they give. There should be discussions of some of the books they read, but those discussions should be open and not bounded by some arbitrary format. And then again, children adore watching adults mess up. They love farce, they love burlesque. I hope they'll love a book I just completed in which Santa does a lot of messing up. So they should not be discouraged from reading about situations in which adults make mistakes. And by the same token, there should be no harm in the teacher or the librarian making a mistake.

Continuing this line of thought, we have to encourage reading aloud, we have to encourage storytelling. What are the rules and regulations for reading aloud? Well, there really aren't any. Do you enjoy what you're reading?

Does the child enjoy it? Can you capture the child's attention? Do you read with expression and a certain amount of vitality to keep the interest of the child? And when it comes to storytelling, you want to encourage the art of listening, you want to make reading a pleasure, you want to paint word pictures in the air and folklore is very good for doing that.

These ideas are simple enough, but if you'd like to know more, two series of six tapes each are now available to help. They're called *Prelude: Children's Book Council Mini-Seminars on Using Books Creatively*, and they can be ordered from the Council in New York. In the first series, Zena Sutherland has done the tape on reading prose aloud, and Augusta baker the one on storytelling.

One of the other tapes in the first series is about reading poetry aloud, and that, too, is important as a way of creating excitement and interest in language. Just for fun, I'd like to read for you now a soon-to-be published poem of mine called "Sleepy Ida."



Sleepy Ida woke up sleepy
Got up sleepy
Got dressed sleepy
Crawled into her brother's teepee
Found she could sleep there too.

Sleepy Ida slept at breakfast
Slept at lunchtime
Slept at picnics
Taken to a special chophouse
Found she could sleep there too.

Holidays were fine for sleeping
Uncles laughing
Aunties peering
Ida'd do some disappearing
Turn up on a porch chair rearing
Fallen fast asleep.

Once her father called for Ida
Got no answer
Called her brother
Mother found her in the hallway
Sleeping against the wall.

Everyone was very angry
Pointed fingers
Did some shouting
Ida didn't mind the hubbub
She slept through it all.

After that some care was taken
Lamps removed
And pillows shaken
Ida would not be outwitted
Slept on the kitchen stove.

Next day Ida went out playing
Found some friends
And did some skating
Afterwards she lay down flat
Slept on the pavement
Just like that.

This was really quite a problem
What to do
And how to solve it
Worried parents asked her questions
Ida fell fast asleep.

Father took her to the doctor
Tests were taken
Brows were wrinkled
When at last they left the office
Ida slept on and on.

Mother took her to the dentist.
Why the dentist?
Well, why not?
The dentist looked and probed and
pondered
Ida went right to sleep.

The doctor shrugged her shoulders sadly
The dentist frowned, said "Nothing new"
Ida rolled her eyes to heaven
Fell asleep at the local zoo.

One day Ida woke up whistling
Got up whistling
Got dressed whistling
Crawled into her brothers' teepee
Found she could stay awake.

Ida ate a giant breakfast
Went outside
Played ball till noon
After lunch no time for napping
She and Annie were off to the moon.

That night mother said "How amazing"
Father added, "This makes a change"
Brother thought she'd been quite
outrageous
Ida said "It was just a phase."

Well, I love this poem, and I'm glad you seem to like it too. It's the sort of thing that really captures children's interest. They love the humor in it. They love the recognizable experiences in which ridiculous things happen. There can, in short, be a whole world of discussion created out of this kind of participatory reading. But as I've indicated, we must also encourage children to write their own poems and their own stories when they can. And of course, and I'm sure you've heard these things before, they should be encouraged at role playing, at performing plays and puppet shows that relate to the books they've been reading or the films they've been watching. They should be encouraged to make their own materials.

My book, *Is Milton Missing?*, is about a Great Dane called Milton that gets lost in a small apartment. Once, when I went to read it to a second grade class, each child had made his or her own Milton cutout in advance. And they were all immensely excited, and I had to look at every single cutout and they were all different and wonderful. I also know of at least one teacher who brings a magic box to class once a week. The magic box contains all sorts of materials about a particular area of interest. Once they've explored those materials, the children go off to the media center for books and anything else that might broaden their knowledge and increase their excitement about the subject.

Books, and of course other media where necessary, cannot be supplementary to textbooks. They must be of equal importance. Textbooks and readers are not exciting for children. They are necessary, where they are necessary; but when there has to be drill time, it should be combined with the use of books and other materials from the library.

But the case for books goes beyond that. Because books are something that can be shared, shared by students together, shared by the teacher, the librarian, and the student.

No matter what you do to it, a film is something you must watch alone. You must listen to a record, even if you can sing along with it. With a storybook, you bring children directly into contact with your voice. The book can be a source of games or discussion afterwards, it's true, but most important, you're bringing yourself into contact with the child. And particularly with a picture book for younger children, you, the teacher or the librarian are brought together with your pupils in a quite extraordinary way.

Kids like being around adults just to watch what they're doing. They don't even have to be played with all the time. There's a little girl who lives downstairs in the brownstone my wife and I live in. She pays a visit every weekend. It doesn't matter what we're doing when she arrives. She just wants to be around us. And, of course, when we are not busy and it's possible to sit down and read one of her favorite books with us, that is best of all.

Particularly with picture books, there are different techniques employed to help create this kind of sharing relationship between the book, the adult, and the child. I've brought three books of mine along just to give you some examples.

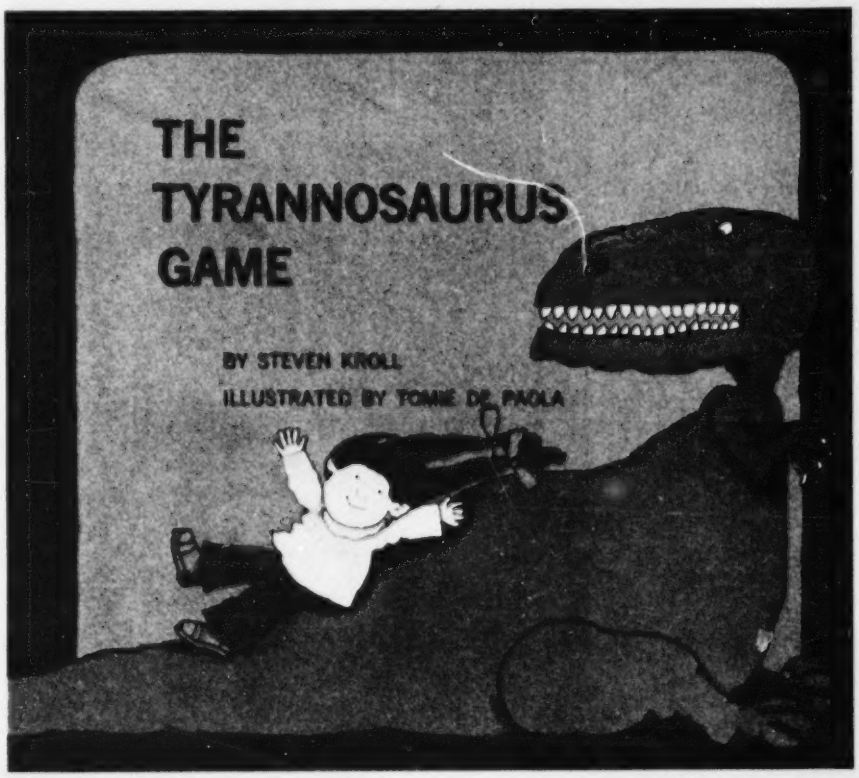
The first is *Is Milton Missing?*, the book I mentioned before. Having begun with Milton's disappearance and his master Richard's relationship with him, the story goes on to deal, on each right-hand page, with Richard's fantasies about what might have happened to Milton and then, on each left-hand page, with the reality. Maybe Milton has fallen out the window (right-hand page), but no, there is the empty street outside the window (left-hand page).

This technique, it seems to me, does several things. It encourages the child to recognize that he or she has thoughts and fantasies that are different from what is actually happening, that those thoughts and fantasies are not always real, and yet there is a way of relating them to actual experience.

At the end of the book, everyone is reunited: Milton, Richard, Richard's neighbor, Daisy (the neighbor's Great Dane), and Daisy's puppies (which, I must admit, is the reason why Milton has not been around). And on the last page you have the puppies themselves which, of course, kids adore. In fact, after I've read this book, kids come rushing up asking, "Can I have a puppy?" And I say, "Why of course," and they take a puppy out of the picture and go off with it.

Another technique is explored in a book of mine called *The Tyrannosaurus Game*. This is the "game" book I referred to earlier. It's about a group of kids who are finding school rather boring when their teacher, bless her, suggests they play a game. And the game they play is a game many of you may know. It's the "pass-the-story-along" game. One of the kids starts with: "Last Saturday I was eating breakfast, when all of a sudden a tyrannosaurus came crashing through the window." And there is, indeed, a picture of a tyrannosaurus crashing through the window. And then Peggy continues the story with: "When I got to Jimmy's house for breakfast, there was a tyrannosaurus at the table. It was eating up all the eggs and there were broken dishes all over the floor." And so it goes from child to child. The tyrannosaurus gets stuck on the stairs, squeezes on a bus, goes to the playground, goes to the amusement park, and finally disappears.

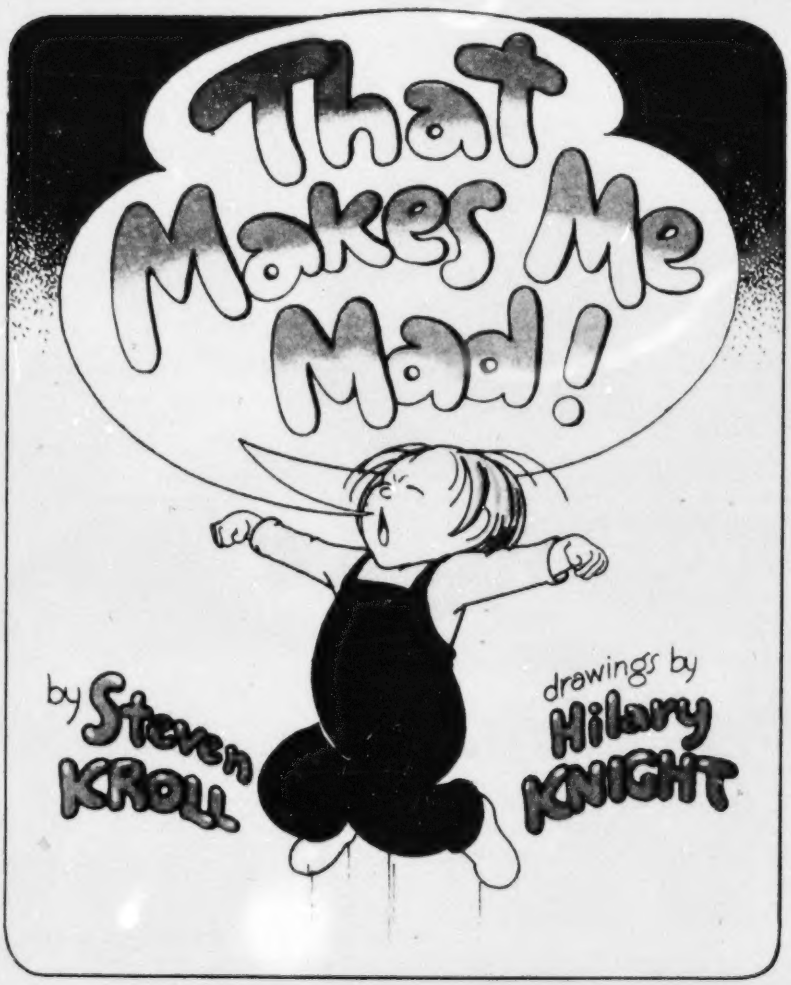
But what is wonderful about the story to me is that children really want to play the game after they have read the book. And, of course, they find the incidents themselves lots of fun. The story actually began as a slightly different game that a child friend of mine and I used to play when he was younger, and the book is dedicated to him for that reason. But what is also nice about this book is that it consists of a whole series of double-page spreads. Which means that when you're reading it aloud, the text corresponds exactly with the picture you happen to be showing. This creates a kind of continuity that is, I've found, very satisfying to the child.



I should also add that there are ways for this game to go terribly awry. Once two kids wanted very much to start because they had just built a very large building out of blocks and thought it could be incorporated into a good story. Unfortunately the story they began turned into "The Towering Inferno." There was no way out. Disaster followed disaster, more and more people were left homeless, and naturally the whole second grade class had a marvelous time while I groaned.

The last book I've brought is called, *That Makes Me Mad!* It's a series of dialogues about what makes kids angry. On each right-hand page there is a statement by Nina, who is five: "When I try very hard and it doesn't come out right, that makes me mad!" And so on. On each left-hand page that follows, there is a scene, designed in comic book form, that provides an example of exactly what the statement means.

Kids love to read this book. We hate to have them read comics, but they love the form because it makes them feel a part of what they're reading. So *That Makes Me Mad!* is fun to read, but what happens most often, and it happens with adults too, is that everyone can relate to the situations on some level. Someone is always coming up and saying, "You know, my daddy never talks to me," or "My mom always breaks her promises." The book provides a way of opening up kids and adults to problems generally left undiscussed. And that adds yet another dimension to how we can relate the books we have for children to them.



Of course, there are other things you can do as you're reading a picture book to children to help them share it with you. If the group is small enough, you can point out certain small details or ask the children to find them. (Earlier, Marilyn Miller mentioned a book to me called *Where's Wallace?* by Hilary Knight, who illustrated *That Makes Me Mad!* Wallace is an orangutan who's always disappearing into crowds, and it's great fun for younger children to try and search him out.) And you can make sure you're close at hand, close enough to be one with your audience but high enough so everyone can see the pictures.

But no matter what your method, no matter how you chose to share the learning experience with children, you must do it without condescension. If you condescend to children, they will know in a moment and you will not communicate with them. Children often know best what they need to learn, and it is time everyone involved in educating them tried to follow their lead. We must give more of ourselves, more of our thoughts and feelings, and we must be willing to learn as well as teach.

Teachers, librarians, writers, we have all been too grown-up for too long. But by recognizing this, and through the enlightened use of books and other media, we can help create the excitement and the liberated imaginations that make for learning at its best. It is a great task.